

House Armed Services Committee

DEMOCRATS

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Ike Skelton, Ranking Member

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Women Removed From Combat Support Roles

Washington D.C.—Today Military Personnel Subcommittee Chairman John McHugh amended the National Defense Authorization Act with a provision that would remove women from Army combat support and combat service support units in which they currently serve.

“The Armed Services Committee had this debate more than 20 years ago,” said **Committee Ranking Member Ike Skelton (MO)**. “Many in Congress, including myself, were concerned about the ability of women to serve in a variety of front line missions. Based on the exceptional performance of our women service members, most recently in Afghanistan and Iraq, I no longer have those concerns.”

“Today, women are essential to our ability to fight the war in Iraq and the global war on terrorism. If our nation is truly committed to winning these wars and meeting our other defense requirements, we cannot afford to reject the talents of women who have served so well,” concluded **Skelton**.

Rep. Vic Snyder (AR) noted, “We have had no hearings on this issue. No reports have been brought to our attention citing evidence that having women in these roles is currently causing a problem for our military. If the Chairman has different information that this committee has not had the opportunity to review, he is urged to share it. Otherwise, there seems to be very little evidence to suggest we move so suddenly on such a contentious provision. We have also received letters from Secretary Harvey and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Cody, in opposition to this proposal.”

“We know that the Army has been struggling to meet recruitment and retention goals. By driving women away from units in such high demand, we are unfairly placing a larger strain on our total force by limiting the number of individuals who are eligible to serve in these areas,” noted **Rep. Susan Davis (CA)**. “Can we really afford to toss out 20% or more of the individuals who are serving so capably in these units?”

“This amendment sends a bad message to all who are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan,” said **Rep. Loretta Sanchez (CA)**. “As the Army continues to face recruiting and retention issues, this is certainly not the time to be taking more soldiers out of our forward support companies. There has been no support on this issue from Army Chief of Staff or General Cody. I’m deeply concerned by ramifications of this amendment and alarmed by its rushed consideration.”

Information is not officially included in the final version of H.R. 1815 until passed by the full House Armed Services Committee on May 18th.